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DE RUEHAN #0691/01 2831319
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1689
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1035
RHMFISS/CDR USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANTANANARIVO 000691

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/E - MBEYZEROV
PARIS FOR D'ELIA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/09/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MA](#)
SUBJECT: MAYOR TO PRESIDENT: JUST LET ME DO MY JOB

REF: A. 07 ANTANANARIVO 001241
[1](#)B. 08 ANTANANARIVO 00644

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES ERIC STROMAYER FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a meeting between Antananarivo Mayor Andry Rajoelina and Ambassador Marquardt, the Mayor outlined his ongoing difficulties with President Ravalomanana and his party, TIM, painting himself as an eager but frustrated reformer who wants nothing more than to do his job. While he believes the President wants him out of power before regularly scheduled elections in 2011, he still believes that following a non-aligned path between the vocal but weak opposition and the President's political allies remains his best option. As the conflict continues, Rajoelina is sympathetic to Embassy concerns about MCC indicators, and sees attention from the international community as a counterbalance to pressure from the government. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Extrapolating from the events of the last month in the ongoing feud with the national government (reftel B), Rajoelina did not hesitate in his assertion that the president's party, TIM, wanted him out. Recent unsuccessful efforts to that effect appear to have been spearheaded by Prime Minister Charles Rabemananjara, and Rajoelina joined recent media speculation that Rabemananjara may soon be retired due to these failures. The President has publicly denied that this is the case, but Rajoelina believes that TIM is already in "election mode", and that his defiance thus far will be seen as TIM's failure if they cannot have their way.

[1](#)3. (C) Frustrated with the financial siege of his administration, Rajoelina finds that he's wasting two thirds of his time on this dispute while his development plans for the city proceed at a crawl. The feud has become so public that during a recent bid to rebuild City Hall, burnt down in 1972 amid political violence, three major contractors backed out for fear of crossing the president - who himself failed to accomplish the same task during his tenure as mayor. Rajoelina stated that he "just wants to develop the city", and wondered aloud why "Ravalomanana is picking on the little mayor". In answer to his own question, however, he admits that his rise to power is an affront to TIM's dominance, and that in the 10 months since he was elected he has gathered substantial information on the previous administration's alleged corruption and financial mismanagement, much of it detailed in an unpublished audit conducted at the beginning of his term. He has no intention of releasing this information at the moment, if only because it would only escalate the conflict with TIM; for now, Rajoelina and his administration remain carefully in the political center, wedged uncomfortably between the opposition and the President.

[1](#)4. (C) Rajoelina was sympathetic to Embassy concerns about

Madagascar's failure to meet certain MCC indicators and hence to qualify for a second compact, and agreed that the situation today had changed from the time of the first compact. He expressed his support for an outspoken international community, mentioning in particular an Embassy editorial published in July 2008 in which the DCM criticized President Ravalomanana's focus on personal business interests. Although print media is relatively free and open to domestic commentators, the Mayor and his supporters are encouraged by international attention to governance in Madagascar. In addition to the President's willingness to toy with administrative structures and financial control in pursuit of his domestic goals, Rajoelina also mentioned the high number of public figures currently in prison and the recent expropriation of land around Antananarivo. The city claims that this land falls within its authority and that the President's development of these areas will deprive the city of a valuable "buffer zone" against floods.

15. (C) COMMENT: The Mayor's comments generally fit media reports and opposition claims, and he was unable to offer significant new insight on the conflict. He intends to push on, despite the government's hostility, and is focused for the moment on finishing his term, and attempting to address what he sees as the city's main socioeconomic problem: the often-cited rising cost of living across the country. It is clear at this point that TIM is playing hardball, and doesn't expect to lose; however, the Mayor is playing his cards close, taking the high road, and garnering popular support because of it. Should the situation worsen, he still has the unpublished audit and untapped opposition support, but for the moment the ball is in the President's court.

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